



**MAKING COMMUNITIES
SAFER AND STRONGER**





WalkSanDiego is a regional, grassroots organization dedicated to enhancing communities by making walking a real choice for all people for health, recreation, and transportation through community participation, education, and advocacy. Formed in 1998, WalkSanDiego works with local governments and community organizations to raise awareness about the importance of walkable neighborhoods, promote pedestrian-friendly street design practices, and advocate for improved policies governing street and neighborhood design. WalkSanDiego has worked in several cities and neighborhoods throughout the region including Encinitas, City Heights, Imperial Beach, North Park, Old Town, San Diego, San Ysidro, and Sherman Heights, while this report presents a case study of WalkSanDiego's best practices and lessons learned in Chula Vista over the past 4 years, where WalkSanDiego has focused intensive efforts to improve walkability within the City of Chula Vista with the generous support of Kaiser Permanente, along with consulting contracts with the City of Chula Vista, the Chula Vista Elementary School District, and San Diego State University Research Foundation. WalkSanDiego collaborated with the City of Chula Vista staff and elected officials (i.e. Council members, Engineering, Police, Planning, Public Works, etc.) in these efforts in addition to many community partners including California Endowment Funded Healthy Eating-Active Communities (HEAC), Chula Vista Community Collaborative, County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency, Network for a Healthy California, and Sweetwater Union High School District.

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In Chula Vista, WalkSanDiego conducted a variety of activities to impact policies through planning efforts as well as engage the community to enhance walkability throughout the City with a particular focus on the Southwest region of the City that has a high amount of missing infrastructure and many low-income, underserved residents. The activities discussed below include key planning activities related to policy that WalkSanDiego influenced in the City of Chula Vista.

PEDESTRIAN MASTER PLAN

WalkSanDiego assisted in the development of the Pedestrian Master Plan (PMP) by serving as a PMP Working Group Member, expanding community input by conducting PMP surveys during other community activities WalkSanDiego was engaged in, and advocating for a plan that supports walkability and pedestrian improvements.

SOUTHWEST CHULA VISTA PLAN

WalkSanDiego participated in the pre-plan community building ‘Southwest United in Action’ project and a series of three southwest Chula Vista urban design workshops as a technical advisor and promoting resident attendance at meetings. WalkSanDiego now serves on the Southwest Working Group to develop a plan for the area.

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ACTION PLAN

WalkSanDiego participated in a 3-day workshop to prepare a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan to document current practices and policies, while also identifying areas for improvement to create a more walkable city. This plan provided a resource for the more extensive and formal development of a Pedestrian Master Plan.

REDEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RAC)

WalkSanDiego reviewed plans and provided technical assistance to the HEAC Manager who serves on the RAC to promote walkable development in the City.

URBAN CORE SPECIFIC PLAN

WalkSanDiego reviewed the plan for a downtown Chula Vista “Urban Core” and provided feedback to City staff and Council to ensure guidelines supported walkability.



WalkSanDiego's practice-related activities include their role in Chula Vista's Safe Routes to Schools and Safe Routes to Parks efforts. WalkSanDiego also played a large role in engaging residents and building community capacity by facilitating communication between the community and city staff.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS

PILOT SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS (SRTS) PROGRAM

With support from Kaiser Permanente, WalkSanDiego targeted three elementary schools, namely Rice, Otay, and Harborside Elementary Schools, that are located in the Southwest region of the City where there is lacking infrastructure and many underserved, low-income residents. WalkSanDiego developed a model to engage residents in assessment of and improvement planning of their school neighborhood to create safer routes for children to walk or bike to school.



The model includes collaborating with community partners (i.e. Healthy Eating-Active Communities, County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency, School District) to host a walkability workshop at the school site inviting parents, school staff, and City staff (i.e. Engineering, Police, Public Works) where WalkSanDiego conducts the following activities:

1. Present a walkability training
2. Lead a walk audit of the surrounding school neighborhood
3. Facilitate neighborhood mapping and document safety issues and needs in the school neighborhood
4. Provide opportunity to prioritize issues through voting process
5. Develop school neighborhood report documenting all the information gathered.
6. Advocate for City to fund or seek funding for improvements to address the pedestrian safety issues identified by residents

Based on this model and the reports developed by WalkSanDiego, the City of Chula Vista and the Chula Vista Elementary School District successfully sought out additional funding to support Safe Routes to Schools activities.

SAFE ROUTES TO PARKS

COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE (CX3) YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

WalkSanDiego collaborated with Healthy Eating-Active Communities (HEAC) and the San Diego County Health & Human Services to conduct the Communities of Excellence (CX3) project to bring together high school youth and Spanish-speaking community leaders (promotoras) as mentors to assess built environment barriers to physical activity and advocate for improvements.



CAMINADO CON FE/ WALKING WITH FAITH

As part of a San Diego State University faith-based research study Caminando con Fe/Walking with Faith, WalkSanDiego trained promotoras to assess the built environment and walkability in and around the Church neighborhood, including a neighboring park.

Both the CX3 youth-promotora group and the Caminando con Fe promotoras selected the same local Chula Vista Park, known as Lauderbach Park, to advocate for improvements. WalkSanDiego facilitated the partnership between the different groups and provided ongoing technical assistance.





LAUDERBACH PARK

The youth, promotoras, and community partners (i.e., HEAC, WalkSanDiego) assessed the park to identify built environment barriers to physical activity and prepared a report of these barriers with recommended solutions. Youth wrote letters to City Council, while the promotoras and community partners testified at City Council to support planned park improvements and advocate for further improvements. This led to a partnership with City staff and officials to modify planned park improvements to address additional issues identified by the youth, promotoras, and community partners.

As a result of these advocacy efforts, additional improvements were made to the park including: increased park security (i.e., lighting, fencing, overgrown plants removed),

improved park safety (i.e., covered sewer drain, sand lot removed), enhanced park amenities (i.e., water fountain, bathroom, benches), improved pedestrian safety in park (i.e., leveled walking paths), and improved children's play area (i.e., new playground equipment, fencing).

The park was re-inaugurated in September 2008 with a community event sponsored by the City of Chula Vista in collaboration with the youth, promotoras, and community partner with over 350 community members attending, 40 organizations participating, speeches by youth and promotora representatives during the dedication ceremony hosted by the Mayor, and media attention from English and Spanish television stations.

This project provides an empirical basis for engaging youth and promotoras as agents of change to advocate for built environment improvements. This partnership can be used as a model of how collaboration can maximize efforts, bring political support, and leverage resources.

As a result of the WalkSanDiego's safe routes to school efforts within Chula Vista, over two million dollars in funding was sought after and received to support infrastructure planning and construction activities, along with non-infrastructure activities.

COMMUNITY-BASED TRANSPORTATION PLAN: CHULA VISTA KIDS WALK & BIKE TO SCHOOL

The City of Chula Vista Public Works Department utilized WalkSanDiego's model as a framework to seek additional funding from a \$240,000 Caltrans Community Transportation Planning Grant to assess the majority of elementary schools (36 of 44) in Chula Vista to identify walkability barriers and issues. The City hired WalkSanDiego to conduct the school walkability workshops and create school improvement plans based on community input received at these workshops.

CHULA VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NON-INFRASTRUCTURE SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL GRANT

The Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD) was awarded a \$499,025 Safe Routes to Schools Non-infrastructure Grant to promote walking or biking to school at 17 elementary schools. WalkSanDiego provided technical assistance as a consultant for the project development and implementation by training each of the participating schools task force members (i.e. parents, students, staff, School Resource Officer, etc.).

Over \$1.5 million in funding was sought after and received by the City of Chula Vista for infrastructure improvements to enhance the walkability of Chula Vista based on the school neighborhood reports prepared by WalkSanDiego including:

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

\$600,000 Federal Safe Routes to Schools Infrastructure Grant for improvements in the Otay & Rice Elementary School neighborhoods including median, curb extensions, curb ramps, flashing beacons, mid-block crosswalk with zebra striping, and school zone signage.

\$200,000 California Safe Routes to Schools Infrastructure Grant for improvements in Lauderbach Elementary School neighborhood including curb extensions, a raised median for pedestrian refuge, advanced warning signals and signage, pedestrian ramps, and a mid-block crosswalk.

Multiple funds for improvements in the Harborside Elementary School neighborhood including a **\$283,000 Smart Growth Incentive Program** for sidewalk installation and **\$500,000 federal allotment** for curb ramps and sidewalks.

There are also additional funding proposals currently under review for school neighborhood improvements in Chula Vista.

The independent evaluation firm Harder + Company conducted an evaluation regarding WalkSanDiego's activities in Chula Vista through interviews with community partners along with City staff (i.e. Engineering, Public Works) and a Councilmember. Some of the key findings were notable organizational strengths of having unique expertise, the ability to work collaboratively with the community, and a solution-focused approach.

WalkSanDiego made unique contributions because they possessed unique expertise their partners often lacked who benefited from their knowledge of pedestrian-friendly street design practices and walkability.

One case study participant stated that, "their expertise was unique and really supported our staff." According to one interviewee, WSD helped them learn how walkability related to the health issues their organization was already addressing. In their words, "I think our work together, as partners, has increased the awareness so that those issues of health and walkability are now more at the forefront of our initiative."



WalkSanDiego engaged the community and addressed pedestrians' needs within that community to make decision-makers more aware of pedestrian needs keeping the community's interest in mind. One example is WalkSanDiego's impact on Chula Vista's safe routes to school efforts.

WalkSanDiego's work on the Safe Routes to Schools project, as well as their ability to engage the community around walkability, was perceived to have the most significant and long-term impact in the Chula Vista area. Several of the interviewees noted that WalkSanDiego's participation was essential to the Safe Routes to Schools project, with one interviewee saying that, "WSD was instrumental in getting those projects going." As part of their role, WSD identified which areas of Chula Vista had the greatest needs, conducted walking audits to identify possible street design improvements, and assisted in implementing the changes. Interviewees believed that physical improvements resulted from WSD's work and also looked forward to more improvements in the future, as additional school sites were targeted.

Evaluation results showed that WalkSanDiego has the ability to effectively facilitate a connection between the community and the City to build collaborative relationships.

Partners noted that WSD members were easy to communicate with because they were responsive and spoke Spanish, which earned citizens' trust. One interviewee said, "The community realized that WalkSanDiego does return phone calls. They work with us, and they are here to help the community so that the community can be a team with them." WSD was also receptive to community concerns and offered residents the opportunity to provide detailed positive and negative feedback by having them identify specific areas of concern on maps of Similarly, WSD empowered community residents to advocate for themselves through workshops. One interviewee noted that residents were initially afraid to speak

before City Council, but because WSD was there to support and validate their experience, they had the courage to voice their opinions and be heard. In one participant's words, "If it wasn't for them [WSD], we would still be in the dark at the park without street lights."

Another aspect of their collaborative work style in Chula Vista was WSD's facilitation of meetings that brought together city staff and officials and Chula Vista residents in a forum that allowed residents to share their concerns. The community noted that these meetings were critical in engaging residents who may have been intimidated by or unsure of how to interact with city staff. In one community organizer's words, "They actually bring the department to the workshops and people are able to address them directly...It's communicating directly with the department that can make a difference." City staff similarly agreed that WSD's role in this facilitation was significant saying, "That whole project was in large part about capacity building. They were there and able to help us a lot of that. That bit of contribution was very important."





Finally, the evaluation highlighted WalkSanDiego's solution-focused approach with the following:

Several participants appreciated WSD's solution-focused approach with one interviewee noting, "They really have the ability to present the problems as well as the solutions." This ability, according to one community partner motivated residents to continue working on the project: "When you see those changes, you think, 'Okay, I can work with this organization because they do have results.'"

Overall, these evaluation results confirm WalkSanDiego's ability to serve and impact Chula Vista over the past few years by bringing unique expertise, working corroboratively with the community and the city, and a solution-focused approach.

A young boy and an elderly woman are walking hand-in-hand in front of a store window. The boy is wearing a striped shirt and khaki pants, and the woman is wearing a white shirt and white pants. The store window has a sign that says "NEWS • GIFTS •".

We believe in a healthy future.

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We believe health isn't an industry—it's a cause. And there's no better feeling than working together for a worthwhile cause. That's why we'd like to thank WalkSanDiego. Because they share our dedication to helping make our community a healthier place to be.

For more information about Kaiser Permanente, visit kp.org/communitybenefit/sca